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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a series of practical, useful tips for creating lessons for adult English language learners (ELLs). It begins by offering seven questions to help the teacher think through the lesson ahead of time. It also provides tips for creating a general lesson plan, and tips for tapping the four language modes: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

## Creating Lessons for Adult ESOL Learners: Getting Started

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Presented as part of a workshop on basic techniques for accommodating adult English  
language learners

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## Thinking through a Lesson

When thinking about creating lessons for adult English language learners, it's important to focus on the language the learners will need to address a specific topic or accomplish a task. This includes language functions (asking a question, stating an opinion, listening for information, etc.) as well as vocabulary and grammatical structures. It's also important to think about the overall cultural implications of the topic, and any cultural knowledge that might need to be conveyed to the learners.

Think about the following questions.

1. What's the topic?
2. What specific language functions or activities do we usually associate with this topic?
3. What language functions associated with this topic are appropriate for my learners?
4. What activities might address or draw out those language functions?
5. What vocabulary and structures might I need to teach/review in relation to this topic?
6. What activities might draw out these structures and vocabulary?
7. What cultural points might I need to address in relation to this topic?

Once you have clarified these points for yourself, it's easier to begin thinking about the general lesson plan.

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## A General Lesson Plan Outline

A general lesson plan focuses on *demonstration, participation, practice, and performance*. Any of the steps can be expanded or repeated as necessary.

- Clearly state objectives
- Preparation –tap learners' prior knowledge and experiences and set the context
- Presentation – provide the information necessary and/or model the skills involved
- Practice – give learners opportunities to engage in structured practice activities
- Evaluation – assess and evaluate what has been done so far
- Expansion – ask learners to use what they learned in different ways or contexts

## **Tips for Tapping the Four Language Modes**

Once you have determined the language learners need to address a specific topic or accomplish a task, you will want to focus on developing activities that develop and practice this language in a way that matches its use in real life. Following are some points to consider when developing speaking, listening, reading, or writing lessons and some activities that you can use to support your objectives.

### **SPEAKING**

#### What works well?

1. Focus on communication of meaning, unless you're working on a specific language or pronunciation objective
2. Create a relaxed atmosphere where learners feel supported in taking risks and speaking freely
3. Provide natural, authentic interactive opportunities
4. Work on pronunciation in context; drill when necessary
5. Be aware of the use of idioms and reduced speech patterns ("I wanna" "She's gotta" etc.). Point them out to learners as appropriate for situation and proficiency level, then provide opportunities to explore and practice them in context. They can be confusing to learners, but they need to learn them.
6. Allow sufficient "wait time" after speaking before expecting learners to respond.

#### Ideas for Activities

1. Debates
2. Information gap activities - one person has information and provides it to another who has to do something with it (For example, one learner has a picture and he/she has to describe the picture to another learner. That learner has to draw the picture. Easily done with directions and a map too).
3. Role plays
4. Interviews
5. Oral reports
6. Story re-tellings
7. Topic prompts or incomplete stories that the learner has to finish
8. Oral descriptions of pictures or comic strips
9. Dialogues
10. Hypothetical situations
11. Giving the learners a list of speaking tasks that they have to complete in a specific context outside the classroom

### **LISTENING**

#### What works well?

1. Choose topics in which listeners' have a high degree of interest.

2. Create a high degree of listener participation in the communicative exchange.
3. Provide opportunities for listeners to use meaning negotiation skills (e.g., asking for clarification, repeating for meaning, "saying it a different way").
4. Limit the amounts of colloquial or reduced speech used by the speaker.
5. Use an appropriate rate of delivery for the learners and the topic.
6. Choose topics/content that is familiar or simple for the learners to grasp.
7. Use visual supports (e.g., pictures, gestures, shared context) when possible.

#### Ideas for Activities

1. Story read-alouds
2. Listening for a purpose set-ups (give the learners specific questions to answer or points to listen for before the speech event)
3. Physical response to commands (e.g., Total Physical Response, Simon Says)
4. Transforming a message (drawing a map from oral directions, etc.)
5. Answering questions
6. Stories on cassette
7. Taking notes or outlining as they listen to a lecture/speech
8. Extend/continue a story prompt (listening and speaking)
9. Repeat/translate/paraphrase
10. Perform a task similar to one just described (modeling)
11. Participating in a conversation or dialogue
12. Scavenger hunts based on listening tasks

## **READING**

#### What works well?

1. Build on prior knowledge/experience in pre-reading activities.
2. Use scaffolding techniques (i.e. provide supports that help learners complete the task).
3. Give learners constant feedback and encourage them to monitor their own reading habits.
4. Provide opportunities for collaborative discussions and interactions before, during and after reading so that learners can discuss, clarify meaning, and share interpretations.
5. Choose reading materials relevant and of interest to learners. Give them the opportunity to choose their own materials.
6. Point out and, if appropriate to the proficiency level, directly teach reading strategies such as finding the main idea, using context cues, predicting, scanning for a purpose, making inferences, etc.
7. Provide opportunities for choice in reading materials and individual sustained silent reading.

#### Ideas for Activities

1. Reading clozes (in a passage read, delete every 5th, 7th, or 9th word and have learners fill them in--this can be used as an assessment tool)

as well)

2. Reciprocal teaching structure (Learners are placed in small groups. The group reads the first paragraph of a reading assignment. First learner summarizes the paragraph and then asks several comprehension questions of others to be sure everyone understands what has been read. This learner then predicts what the next paragraph will be about. Group reads second paragraph and second learner repeats steps taken by the first. Learners continue, taking turns, until all paragraphs are covered.)
3. Literature response logs (a journal of learners' responses to their readings)
4. Reading checklists (helps learner and teacher keep track of number and variety of materials read)
5. Use materials generated by learners as reading materials (can be your own learners' materials or those produced by other learners)
6. Story re-tellings
7. Magazine/newspaper article reports (like book reports, only less extensive)
8. Unstructured reading time (time to read something of their choice)
9. Literature circles (opportunities for students to share what they are reading)

## **WRITING**

### What works well?

1. Provide constant feedback, from teacher and from peers.
2. Provide opportunities for authors to negotiate meaning with others (for example, peer feedback sessions, writing work groups).
3. Address grammar points and the mechanics of writing in context, as mini-lessons integrated in an authentic writing event.
4. Assign relevant topics or allow learners to choose their own topics.
5. Use reading! Good writers are usually extensive readers. Use reading materials as examples and point out good writing point when reading.
6. Give learners sufficient time to write.
7. Help learners tap prior knowledge before beginning to write. Teach them to do this themselves, as part of the writing process.
8. Use dialogue and other journals that provide safe, individual arenas for writing.

### Ideas for Activities

1. Interactive writing such as dialogue journals or e-mail or other penpals
2. Process writing (a structure making the process of writing more evident to the learners. Involves taking them specifically through the steps of brainstorming ideas, writing a first draft, revising based on peer suggestions, and final editing)
3. Comic strip stories (learners are provided comic strips or picture sequences with no dialogue or story and they have to create the dialogue or story for them)
4. Patterned stories or poems (In these, the teacher provides some sort of structure for a story or a poem and learners fill-in the details. A patterned poem might ask for the name of a person on line one; three adjectives about the person on line two; two

verbs associated with the person on line three; and the name of the person again on line four. A patterned story might use the same tactics to elicit characters, setting, and sequence of action.)

5. Set up writing centers in the classroom where learners can go to write
6. Writing prompts/incomplete stories for learners to use as starters
7. Language Experience Approach (Often used for lower literacy levels. Learners share an experience together; learners then tell a story based on the experience as teacher writes what they dictate; learners then use this as their reading material)



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